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ON-THE-RECORD BRIEFING

Under Secretary of State For Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns
On UN Reform

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MR. MCCORMACK: Good morning, everybody. Thank you for coming to this briefing. Under Secretary Burns is here today to talk about our positive agenda for UN Reform. He's going to have some brief opening remarks and then we'll be ready to take some questions from you. So, I will turn it over to Under Secretary Burns.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you. This is actually my first time in this briefing room. I remember the old briefing room, Barry, in which you and I and Charlie spent many hours together. So it's a nice --

QUESTION: Anything on Lebanon?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Anything on Lebanon, no. I'm going to talk about United Nations reform. Is that okay with you?

QUESTION: Is that your first question of your day?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: It was my first question, as I remember. Let me talk to you about United Nations reform. I know you'll have a chance to speak to the Secretary later on today when she gives her press conference in this room. I thought I would just take you through the United States approach to UN reform -- both the broader set of reforms that are at the heart of the debate in New York and also the more public debate about Security Council reform and let you know how we're proceeding, what kind of conversations we've had with allied governments and friendly governments around the world, and then I'll be happy to take your questions.

The United Nations is engaged in one of the most important debates, one of the most critical debates in the history, the 60-year history of the organization because what is at stake is the need for this institution to undertake fundamental reforms and to strengthen itself. And this debate lies at the heart of the future of the UN. Secretary General Kofi Annan has been leading it. And now the United States is prepared to help lead the effort to strengthen the UN, so that it can meet the challenges that are at the core of our 21st century world.

I would also say this, that the United States believes the UN, the United Nations, the United Nations system, is critical to stability in the world. We're a strong supporter of the UN. We're one of the founding nations. We are the host nation. We are the leading contributor of financial resources and we're one of the countries that is most often involved in UN missions around the world.

We respect very much the work that Secretary General Kofi Annan has done to provide a framework for this reform debate. We've looked very carefully at his proposals. We agree with

many of them, not all of them. But we are now prepared to dive into this debate in a fundamental way and help lead the debate toward the September summit, which will be a summit of world leaders intended to look forward to strengthen the United Nations.

We think it's essential that United Nations reform be viewed as a whole, and that no single issue be allowed to vault ahead of any others. In that sense, reform of the Security Council while very important, cannot be the exclusive focus of our attention. There are a broader set of reforms that have to be at the heart of strengthening this institution. And we want to make sure, of course, that we're working well with the Congress, we're working well with those in our society that have a fundamental interest in the UN.

So we were very pleased to see the presentation of the Gingrich-Mitchell Report yesterday by the congressionally mandated commission. We worked closely with them. You'll remember that Secretary Rice met with them. I met with them. We had long discussions about their work. They took their job very seriously. They traveled up to the UN. They traveled to a number of leading member states of the UN. And as a result, they produced a very fine report, which gives us a good way forward and the Administration agrees with the vast majority of recommendations that Mr. Gingrich and Mr. Mitchell have made -- not all of them, but the vast majority.

We also want to continue to work very closely with the leadership of the Senate and the House on pressing forward on the reforms that the United Nations needs to see. We think we've had a good dialogue with both the Senate and House leadership. We count on their support in the future. And as they look through the Gingrich-Mitchell report, we hope that we'll be able to have a united way forward.

Now, as you know, we indicate yesterday that the Administration does have serious concerns with the bill presented in the House of Representatives by Chairman Hyde and others. We don't object to the entire bill because the bill is designed to strengthen the United States and, in that sense, we agree with some provisions of the bill. But we have serious concerns with aspects of it. Let me speak about two.

There is one provision in the bill that would require the United States Government to withhold up to 50 percent of our annual contributions -- and we're the largest contributor to the UN system -- if, I think, a total of nearly 40 reforms were not enacted. We think this provision is unacceptable. It would depreciate the credibility of the United States as one of the leading members of the United Nations. It would diminish our effectiveness and would not allow us to play the leading role that we need to play on reform.

Secondarily, there are aspects of the bill that would restrict the President's constitutional duties to instruct his ambassadors and to pursue a foreign policy -- that has to be centered in the Executive Branch. We've made both of these concerns clear to the House leadership as of yesterday and, as you know, we've made some public statements yesterday to this effect.

But if I could return to the UN reforms in general, what is happening in New York is that Secretary General Annan has given a template to the United Nations for reform. He has advocated a series of initiatives to strengthen the workings of the General Assembly and of the Security Council. We want to start, first and foremost, with budget reform, with management reform, and with administration reform in the Secretariat and in the UN seat in New York itself. Chris Burnham, who was the Chief Financial Officer of the State Department and then Acting Under Secretary, has just been appointed to be the new Under Secretary for Management of the United Nations. Secretary Rice pushed hard for that appointment and we believe that Chris can now be in the lead, working with the Secretary General, to push forward on those management and budget reforms that have to be undertaken because they're so important in light of some of the irregularities, in light of some of the problems that you have seen that the Volcker Commission has raised.

Secondarily, there are a number of other reforms that are critical to improving the functioning of the UN and its ability to be helpful and indeed vital in responding to crisis situations around the world. First and foremost is the Secretary General's idea of a Peace Building Commission that would allow the United Nations to be more effective in galvanizing the work of the international community to help countries after the fighting has stopped in a civil war or a war. Think of Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and Haiti, just to mention a couple of the crisis areas of the last decade. We need a more effective ability to provide reconstruction support, humanitarian support, and long-term development in a society after a conflict has been fought. And we firmly support the Peace Building Commission.

We also support the Secretary General's initiative to reform the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. He proposes the creation of a Human Rights Council. You all know the problems that the United States and many other countries have with the current commission in Geneva, where countries like Zimbabwe, for instance, sit in judgment of democratic countries. We prefer the creation of a Human Rights Council that would be smaller, that would be, of course, filled with democratic countries and where countries that are subject to the United Nations sanctions would not have the right to sit, and a council that could promote democracy and promote greater adherence to human rights around the world.

We also support the creation of a democracy fund. President Bush in his UNGA speech in September 2004 advocated this. He put this proposal on the table. A number of our ally countries have said they will contribute to it. Of course, the United States will contribute to it, as democracy promotion is one of the core aims of this Administration.

We are also pursuing the adoption of a comprehensive convention on counterterrorism. This is a longstanding issue at the United Nations. It is time to put this forward and agree to it in the General Assembly, and that will be one of our major objectives.

And last, there is a widespread international debate about development that is part of the debate about UN reform. It's also part of the G-8 debate, about the Gleneagle Summit. And here the United States intends to play a leading, active, and positive role in this discussion. We are one of the lead contributors of development assistance worldwide, if you look at our totals in Africa, for instance, where we've tripled our development aid. And we think that the proper way to measure any country's contribution to poverty alleviation and to development in the developing world is to look at the totality of what that society does.

In the case of the United States, for instance, we're one of the largest purveyors, by dollar volume, of grant assistance from our government. But more importantly, if you look at what the American NGO community is doing; what American business is doing in terms of investment; what can be done through trade, expanded trade opportunities, and reducing trade barriers; what could be the positive, beneficial impact of CAFTA, for instance. If you look at the totality of what societies do, we think that is the proper way to measure in the 21st century effective contributions to development in difficult parts of the world.

Now, having said that, having listed those as our major reform priorities, let me tell you that Secretary Rice believes that we should be focusing on these issues in New York. And as we look towards the September summit, it'll be these issues that we hope to conclude and celebrate as achievements of the General Assembly and the Security Council. And we'll push forward on these issues first because, if you think about it, we're really talking about the restructuring of the United Nations -- the strengthening of the foundations of the UN system. And we've got to pay attention to these reforms first.

Embedded in this discussion is the more public debate that you've seen about whether or not the Security Council should also be modernized and whether there should be an enlargement of the Security Council. The United States recognizes that the Security Council needs to look more like the world of 2005 than the world of 1945, when the Security Council and the UN system were

created, sixty years ago. And we're very much open to the debate about whether or not the Council should be expanded.

But we see this debate as only one of the issues that has to be put forward. And we'd like to see progress on all the other issues before we turn our full attention to the UN Security Council debate itself. **We think it's very important as we look at Security Council enlargement, not just to look at it as a debate of what parts of the world should be represented, which geographic region should have the greatest number of seats or the least number of seats. We think it's more important to look at the criteria for which countries are now eligible and which countries are supremely well qualified to become members of the Council.**

And so we would introduce early next week in the General Assembly, into the debate there, that we have to have an agreement on the criteria that each country that comes on the Council as a permanent member or non-permanent member should be able to live up to.

Let me give you some examples of that. Certainly, the size of a country's economy is important; the size of its population; its military capacity, its potential to contribute militarily to United Nations peacekeeping missions; its contributions to peacekeeping; its commitment to democracy and human rights; its financial contributions to the United Nations system; its record and commitment on counterterrorism; its record and commitment on nonproliferation; and we have to look, of course, at the geographic balance, overall, of how the Security Council is constituted.

So we'll be submitting, early next week, our Ambassador Anne Patterson will put forth these views for us in the General Assembly -- that the debate, until this date, has largely been predicated on the geographic factors and we think there should be a wider debate that would include a discussion of all this criteria -- and this is a new approach. This is a new American idea that we think will make this debate on Security Council reform more effective. And we trust and hope very much that the other members of the General Assembly will see it the same way.

On Security Council expansion itself, we would likely support adding two or so new permanent members to the Council, based on the set of criteria that I've just read out to you. And of course you know that we have longstanding support for Japan. And the Secretary called Foreign Minister Machimura of Japan just about an hour ago to tell him that we very much support the candidacy of Japan to become a member -- a permanent member of the Security Council.

In addition to our likely support for two or so new permanent members, we will also support two or three additional non-permanent seats. And that would expand the Council from its current size of 15 members to 19 or 20. Why is the United States putting forward these ideas, a criteria-based approach, and these numbers that I've just given you? Because we find that the debate on Security Council reform has been very polarizing. There are two camps: one, that proposes six permanent seats and a number of other non-permanent seats at the Council; another of equal size proposing only non-permanent seats adding to the Council; both will result in a Council of 24 or 25 members.

We have to be concerned, as one of the custodians of the Security Council, as a member of the Permanent Five. We have to be concerned about the effectiveness of a Security Council. And so we believe that an intake of nine or ten countries is not easily digestible by the United Nations Security Council. We wouldn't be able to be assured that the

Council's effectiveness could be continued. And that has to be the standard, that and these criteria that I've mentioned, by which we judged this debate.

And so we'll be in favor of a more modest expansion. And again, one that would follow the implementation of some of the other reforms that are critical for the future of the UN.

Two final points, very quickly. All of this points to the fact that the United States needs in New York a seasoned diplomat in the person of John Bolton to become our Ambassador there to lead this reform debate. We're entering now the critical stage. We're mid-June, the high-level event, the summit, is in September. It'll be this summer -- the second half of June, July, August, the first part of September -- where all of these reforms are debated and we hope many of them will be concluded. We need an Ambassador at the United Nations and we hope very much that the Senate will now rise to its duties and confirm John Bolton so that the President and Secretary Rice can send him to New York to take his place in this debate.

And finally, let me say we've spent a lot of time on this issue over the last couple of weeks. I think Secretary Rice has probably spent more time on this issue, in strategy sessions and in conversations with her counterparts around the world, than any other over the last several weeks. And she is seized by it because she sees the importance of strengthening the United Nations, the importance of the U.S. being a leader in this debate. And so that's why she spoke with Foreign Minister Machimura, Foreign Minister Fischer this morning. That's why she convened a conference call of the Permanent 5 foreign ministers ten days ago. And I think in her trip to the Middle East, and certainly when she goes to Brussels and London at the end of the trip next week for the two multilateral events, there'll be lots of discussion among the ministers about this. I know Secretary Rice looks forward to that as the U.S. continues to lead in this effort.

So that is a rather comprehensive look, Barry, at this issue. I'm happy to take any questions that you have.

QUESTION: Let me, although you said it's not the most important by any means, issue, the expansion of the Security Council has taken a lot of attention, command a lot of attention. When you speak of two or so permanent members, is the thinking here they would have veto power? And what is the thinking about the additional seats? Presumably they would not have veto power.

And if I can tack something on, I heard your criteria and I also heard Kim Holmes say, in Japan's favor, its financial contributions was a very strong argument for Japan. You know, nobody would -- I don't suppose anybody here would argue that India isn't democratic, that Brazil isn't democratic, that Germany isn't democratic. If democracy is the test, how can you be so -- have such a narrow addition plan of two or so new permanent members?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Barry, thanks for helping me out.

QUESTION: Oh, one last thing.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Okay.

QUESTION: Are you guys thinking in terms of -- because I have reason to believe the Germans are not opposed to it -- sort of a collective seat as a compromise, the European seat or an Asian seat or an African seat?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Okay, Barry, thanks for your questions.

On the question of the veto, I think it's been made clear to us by most of the members of the group that is supporting a large expansion of the Council that they would not insist on retaining the veto if any one of them came on to the Security Council. And **it's our very strong view that the veto should remain with the Permanent 5 and the veto should not be extended to any new permanent members of the Council.**

Secondly, on the criteria issue, we tried -- we stepped back, and over a period of several of several months in our government and in conversations with a lot of friends around the world, tried to think of the set of criteria that any country should have to meet a very high standard: Which country is supremely well qualified to be in the Council? In the 60-year history of the United Nations, the composition of the Council has been amended exactly once, and that's when China took its seat over 30 years ago. So this is a momentous debate and it's a very important debate. It's not a debate that can be taken lightly or blithely. It's one that deserves a lot of consideration and indeed there's been many years of discussion about this.

So we anticipate a complex debate on this issue and we felt it was right to get away from the current debate, which essentially boils down to which countries of the world should be -- which parts of the world should be represented on the Council. We thought it was much more appropriate to ask the following question: What should be -- What attributes and what capabilities should candidates to become permanent members have? And so I read out the list of criteria to you. We think that Japan meets all these criteria. We have long supported Japan for a Security Council membership.

Japan is now the second leading contributor of financial resources to the Council -- to the United Nations, after the United States. Japan, in recent years, has become one of the leading contributors of military assets to UN peacekeeping missions. Japan has been at the forefront of much of what the United Nations has been doing and Japan has actually seconded some of the leading officials to the UN who have been able to reform the UN over the last decade or so. So we have very strong support for Japan and we haven't made a decision on who else we would support. We'll have to see how this debate goes.

And, Barry, in answer to your question, **we think that the more modest enlargement that we would recommend in this -- that we recommend in this debate is sensible because we have to be concerned about effectiveness. Nobody should want to see the Council expanded in such a way that it becomes an ineffective body, a body that can't take decisions, a body that can't react to world crises. That has to be at the center of our thinking on the Security Council.**

And finally, you asked about a collective seat. **We have not advocated that any region of the world have a collective seat and I do not believe that proposal has been put forward in any kind of serious way in the current debate in New York.**

Charlie.

QUESTION: As a follow-up -- can I do a follow-up?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I try to defer to the wires but I just saw Charlie, and since the Red Sox won last night and he and I are Red Sox fans, I thought I'd call him.

QUESTION: On the effectiveness issue, Nick, the Security Council, some people argue, is not very effective with five. You're going to enlarge to some degree. It's going to be much more unwieldy however you go, on the one hand. And you come from NATO, where you do it by consensus, with now 25, is it, or 26?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Twenty-six, Charlie. And we are a supremely effective organization.

QUESTION: Supremely effective. (Laughter.)

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: So if NATO's the standard, we're going to be fine in the UN.

QUESTION: Well, okay. So what's the difference, as it were, if you're enlarging it and not giving them veto power anyway, whether you go to 22 or 25 or 26?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: If you look at the history of the UN Security Council, you'll see that nearly from its inception, all the way through to late '80s, early '90s, it was a body that was not effective in many respects in addressing the most critical global problems because of the Cold War and because of the divide at one point between the United States and China or the United States and the then-Soviet Union.

But since the end of the Cold War, we've seen the resurgence and re-emergence of the Security Council as a largely effective body that can help to provide stability in the world and help to respond to crisis situations. We have had a very good working relationship with the Russian Federation for many years, for well over a decade on the Security Council, and a much improved relationship on the Council with China.

And you've seen just in recent months the Council reacted authoritatively, quickly, and decisively to the crisis in Lebanon. The Council passed UN Resolution 1559 that really gave us a way forward -- we, the international community -- to help those who want to see democracy and full sovereignty return to Lebanon. That's just one example.

But the Council's also been very effective in Afghanistan and the Council has provided the framework through which all international assistance -- military and economic -- is now flowing to Afghanistan.

So it is important that the Security Council remain effective and we do believe that a more modest expansion of the type that we have indicated today would be much more likely to maintain that effectiveness than a larger big-bang expansion where its effect would be highly in doubt.

Arshad.

QUESTION: Just very quickly, in talking about your support for Japan, you said "very much support," "strongly support." Can you say unambiguously that it is the U.S. Government's view that one of the two or so countries that you would support for permanent membership will be Japan?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Yes.

QUESTION: Okay. Second, in making clear that Security Council reform is last on your list -- you said everything else should be agreed before you get to that -- are you not perhaps consigning that question to "Neverland?" Because it's going to be enormously difficult to reach agreement among so many countries on all the other matters. Is this perhaps a way of scuttling the issue of Security Council reform?

And thirdly, do you believe that there is sufficient support in the House and Senate to pass the Hyde bill with the withholding provisions? And if it came to that, would the President consider a veto, given your strong opposition to it?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, I thought I presented our views in a subtle way on how Security Council reform fits into the larger debate, but let me try it again because I don't want to mislead you.

What we are saying is this, and Secretary Rice feels very strongly about this and she's mentioned it to all of her colleagues over the last several days around the world, that there's no question that all of us need the United Nations and need a stronger United Nations, but we have now a United Nations badly in need of structural reform. And so if we spend all of our time over the next three months debating Security Council expansion and don't debate democracy promotion, budget reform, management reform, administrative reform, a peacekeeping commission, human rights council, then we won't be strengthening the United Nations; we'll only be dealing with one ailment, one symptom of the illness that currently afflicts the United Nations.

So her strong view is, and I'm sure she'll -- I know she'll say this if you ask her about it at 3 o'clock -- is that we've got to focus at this main body of reforms. It doesn't mean that we're insisting that all of these reforms be made before we can then turn to Security Council reform. I didn't think I said that. But what I said was that **we've got to have some progress and we've got to work seriously towards these accomplishments in the main body of reforms; and simultaneously, of course, as of today and next week, begin a very serious discussion of UN Security Council reform.**

But we don't want to see all the oxygen sucked out of the room in the General Assembly, the hall of the General Assembly, by the Security Council debate. We've got to have a focus on these others. **We've got to have results by September on those others.** And we will work very seriously on Security Council reform and we'll work to support Japan. We'll work to support our idea that we need to turn to criteria -- and that's how you'll see the United States act. So I hope I've calibrated it in such a way that it will not be misunderstood.

Second, you asked about the bill in the House. It may come up to a vote today. We have told the House and all the members of the House that we have serious concerns and that we object to two major provisions of the bill. And we hope very much, in fact, then that that bill would not be passed in its present form. And if a similar bill is proposed in the Senate, we would make the same representations to the Senate that we have to be concerned about the credibility of the United States as the host country and largest contributor -- the UN system depends on our support.

Now, the Congress is absolutely right to take a hard-nose attitude towards the need for reform. And we support Chairman Hyde and other members of the House who believe that the time has come for fundamental reform. We support that. We just don't think that it would enhance our effectiveness as a country, in the UN system and worldwide, if we somehow withheld 50 percent of our funds because all of those reforms had not been enacted. I think the Congress can be assured that the President and Secretary have in the forefront of their UN agenda, reform -- and we'll take a very tough and aggressive attitude in the debate to push forward those reforms. That's why I've highlighted them today.

But we also think that the United States should pay its dues. And the United States should be reliable. And the United States should be fully involved in supporting the UN system.

QUESTION: Would the President consider a veto if it came to that? Or is it --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Oh, it hasn't. It hasn't come to that. That question hasn't been risen because this is a very early stage. This is a bill that's going to be voted upon possibly today. We've made our intentions clear and we hope very much that these two provisions that we find objectionable will not be in any final bill that is passed by either the House or the Senate.

QUESTION: Nick, can you expand on the -- you talk about the dues one, as being one of the, kind of, concerns that you have in the bill. Could you expand on the other -- on the other concern? It was a little bit unclear.

And I also have a question about the convention on counterterrorism. You said it's time to put forward and agree to it. What is holding it up? Is it the very core of the definition of terrorism that countries can't agree? Or is it the mechanisms by which you fight terrorism?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Okay. Well, on your first question it's a very straightforward issue. The President has constitutional authority to devise and direct the foreign policy of the United States. And we believe that the way the current bill is written, there are provisions of it that would, in effect, dictate to the President what the policy should be. And in effect, what instructions the President would have to convey to his Ambassador to the United Nations. And so on those grounds, on constitutional grounds, we think that provision is unacceptable to us.

On a second issue, we, of course, as the leading country in the world trying to unite the international community in the fight against global terrorism, believe that the United Nations needs to speak with one voice. And it has been a very long and often very sterile debate in the United Nations about the definition of terrorism -- a longstanding debate. We'd like to see that debate conclude, and we think it's time for this convention to be passed. We hope that'll be done by the time the world leaders, including our President, arrive in New York in September.

Yes. You had a question.

QUESTION: Just a quick on -- you said two or so permanent seats?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Yes.

QUESTION: Are you fixed on two or flexible on that?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I believe what I said was it's likely, that we will likely support adding two or so permanent members to the Council. Likely to support two or so -- it means exactly what it says.

QUESTION: And whether it is confined to the three other members within the so-called Group of Four: that's Brazil, India and Germany.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Let me say a word about the Group of Four proposal, because Secretary Rice has given a lot of thought to it. She's had conversations, of course, with all the ministers of these four countries, including some addressed this morning. And I have been in contact with all of these countries as well over the last couple of days.

We have great respect for the Group of Four. They're all friends of ours. And we know that their intention is to strengthen the UN and that's ours, too. We just feel that in both of the major reform proposals, of Security Council and New York -- they're loosely referred as Option A and Option B -- the Group of Four proposal and the other proposal, they would entail very large intake of countries under the Council in one fell swoop. And as I've said before, we think that would be possibly injurious to the effectiveness of the Council and it wouldn't be a wise and pragmatic step forward.

And so we'd explain to the members of the Group of Four that we respect all of them, we want to work with all of them, but it's our view that we need to have a more measured and pragmatic approach because we have to, we have to ensure effectiveness.

MR. MCCORMACK: You have time for one more question.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Okay.

QUESTION: Secretary Burns, would you support Congressman Lantos's version of the bill, which would leave it to the Secretary Rice's discretion whether to hold dues back?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, let me say first that we have great respect for Congressman Lantos and have worked with him very closely on UN reform. I don't think it's appropriate for me to get into a debate about which bill might be better because, frankly, we would like to see a bill that focuses on reform. And that pushes for a reform but which would not tie the hands of the President or the Secretary of State and how we direct our involvement at the United Nations.

And so we've been in touch, obviously, with many members of Congress in the House, including Congressman Lantos. But I just haven't been able to look closely enough at the various bills to be able to give you a good report on that.

QUESTION: Thank you.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you.